



Learning Community as a Framework for the Professional Development of Preschool Teachers - Theoretical Approach and Practical Implications

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Abstract: The paper addresses the importance of the professional development of preschool teachers through its positioning and action in relation to the concept of a learning community. By analyzing the literature, reviewing theoretical concepts and empirical research, the synergistic effect of the process of professional development of teachers and the concept of a learning community is determined. First of all, the benefits to which the process of professional development of teachers contributes within the learning community are determined, especially in the form of improving the educational process, professional competence and personal development of teachers, and most importantly, for the well-being of children. The aim of the paper is focused on a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical implications in the form of the influence of the learning community on the professional development of teachers, as well as the practical implications that are accordingly reflected in pedagogical practice. The above approach supports and affirms the principles of plurality and individual differences of each individual. Community is seen as a key concept within which quality and functional relationships are built, which contributes to the improvement of educational work. The proposal for the professional development of teachers within the learning community, as part of the transformation of the educational system in preschool education, is based on the belief that activities that include interaction, cooperation and exchange of knowledge and experiences contribute to more efficient results that are reflected in educational outcomes.

Keywords: *preschool teacher, learning community, professional development, preschool institution, educational work.*

Introduction

Early childhood is recognized as a crucial period in which the foundations of human development are determined and directed, both from a social perspective and from the perspective of getting to know and building interactions with the environment, which in times of rapid social change further emphasizes the professional role of teachers. Teachers must be competent to identify and value the individual rhythm and developmental capacity of each child in a knowledge society. In this sense, the continuous professional development of teachers is based on the ethical and reflective nature of the profession, which is very complex primarily because of its social responsibility and significant impact on the development and progress of children in the education system (Nedimović et al., 2022). Committed to focusing their resources and skills on empowering children and developing their potential, teachers achieve this through building quality relationships, active involvement in the educational process, maintaining balance, and respecting the individuality of each child (Osnove programa predškolskog vaspitanja i obrazovanja „Godine uzleta“, 2018).

Therefore, the learning of teachers is not limited to a specific time period, to initial education, but is an integral part of their entire professional engagement. Also, effective professional development

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cannot be reduced to periodic activities, but must be a continuous process within which one's own professional assumptions and practices are continuously reviewed (Ferraro, 2001). Therefore, the professional development of preschool teachers within the learning community, as part of the educational transformation of preschool education, is based on the views that activities that involve interaction, cooperation and exchange of knowledge and experience lead to more effective results while respecting and appreciating the principles of plurality and individual multiple diversity of each individual. This transformation, although it encompasses changes of a wide scale, also has a personal dimension, because each teacher plays a key role in its implementation. It seeks to foster fundamental changes in thinking and understanding within the learning community, whereby professional work becomes far more affirmative through collaboration, interconnectedness, and shared action, as opposed to isolated individual engagement without collaboration (Briskin et al., 2009).

Professional development and professional training of preschool teachers

In addition to the fact that the role of the teacher is crucial for encouraging the comprehensive development of the child's personality, it also contributes to the shaping of future generations and the development of their value systems.

For this reason, teachers should continuously work on improving their professional skills: co-construction of knowledge and development of competencies. The process of professional development, in this context, is a key basis for strengthening competencies and better fulfilling the requirements of the profession.

Professional development is defined as "a set of different experiences and skills that can be the result of spontaneous learning or consciously planned activities that are useful in improving educational work" by Radovanović (2019, 81). He emphasizes the importance of several factors that form the basis of professional development: compulsory education, internship period, professional development, monitoring and evaluation. According to the Vescio, Ross and Adams, 2008, professional development is a systematic activity that enables teachers to improve their skills through education, induction, professional development and continuous development in the work environment. It is also important to emphasize that professional development is a multi-directional process that encompasses the professional, personal and social dimensions of teachers (Valenčič Zuljan and Trošelj Blanuša, 2014).

According to the Regulation on Continuous Professional Development and Promotion of Teachers, Preschool Teachers and Professional Associates (Pravilnik o stalnom stručnom usavršavanju i napredovanju u zvanja nastavnika, vaspitača i stručnih saradnika, 2021) ("Sl. glasnik RS", No. 109/2021, Article 2), professional development is defined as "a complex process that involves the continuous development of competencies for the purpose of better performance at work and improving the development of children, students and trainees, i.e. the level of their achievements". Accordingly, professional development includes the acquisition of new and development of existing competencies, which is of key importance for the improvement of educational work and child care.

According to Stamatović (2006), professional development is a continuous process that begins with the choice of a profession, continues through initial education (faculties and vocational schools for preschool teachers), induction into work (internship), and then includes ongoing development, professional development and further education through work. From the viewpoint of constructivist and socio-constructivist perspectives of professional development, professional development is seen as a "dual process that contributes to the construction of knowledge and identity of a person, and includes personal, professional and socio-cultural (or organizational) dimensions" (Gosselin et al., 2014, 24). Independent professional development influences the formation of a worldview, and purposeful and meaningful experiences during the professional development process contribute to the creation of a positive attitude towards the process of advancement and future segments of professional development (Koay, 2023).

Some authors (Whitebook et al., 2009) equate professional development with the term in-service training, which refers to educational activities undertaken by preschool teachers who are already employed.

Analyzing the initiative to begin professional development, Jul and Jensen (2014) see the professional problem that arises in educational practice as the basic determinant, viewing professional development as part of the professional environment. According to the authors, professional development is "a continuous structured process in which we explore, recognize and process patterns of thinking and acting that prevent or hinder us from achieving our professional engagement, goals and potential in professional

relationships" (Jul, Jensen, 2014, 154). The aforementioned authors point out that problems in the educational process should not be seen as unexpected, but as a common part of the process that requires continuous resolution. Not only awareness of their existence is crucial, but also the approach to solving these problems, which requires continuous reflection and adaptation of teachers. Certain destructive behavioral phenomena such as some frustrations and exhaustion do not occur as a result of problems, but as a result of the suppression of the constructive potential of professionals and the courage to face these problems in an appropriate manner. Namely, knowledge and skills can be improved if the teacher has identified the problem and continuously tries to neutralize it, preventing the occurrence of similar problems. At the same time, some authors criticize the complete separation of personal and professional development, emphasizing the inextricable link between these two aspects, because professional development has a profound impact on the personal behavior of an individual, because personal development is characterized by freedom in choosing activities. It is precisely this freedom that implies the ability of an individual to develop his skills and abilities in a way that is consistent with personal values and professional ambitions, which is crucial for his successful and balanced professional and personal life.

Mizell (2010) lists three main effects of professional development: the teacher acquires new knowledge and skills, improves the management of educational work, and contributes to better achievements of children. According to the aforementioned author, all individuals have a certain role in the professional development of teachers. Parents and the community should support the professional development of teachers, and the management of institutions has a responsibility to encourage and provide support to teachers in their professional development, as well as to call on them to take responsibility for progress and continuous improvement in accordance with professional standards and the needs of the education system. Innovating the process of professional development of teachers also includes the application of a transdisciplinary approach, where the teacher acts as a proactive subject who, by actively expressing the needs for improvement, within the concept of lifelong learning, maximizes their professional potential (Serdenciuc, 2013). The three main goals of professional development relate to changing educational practices, changing attitudes and beliefs of teachers, and changing learning outcomes of children (Guskey, 2002).

When studying the professional development of preschool teachers, significant attention is paid to the analysis of the personality of the teacher, with some authors (La Paro, King, 2019) pointing out that his professional activity is largely determined by a set of individual characteristics. The effectiveness of the teacher is particularly emphasized as a key component that influences the process of professional development. In accordance with the above statement, professional development programs represent factors that not only increase the self-confidence of the teacher, but also contribute to his greater efficiency in the educational process. Another important aspect considered in the context of the professional development of teachers is their disposition for this process. Some authors, such as Oztok, 2024, emphasize that professional development brings teachers a better position in society, advancement in professional circles, and an increase in social status. Also, Ganser (2000) highlights that professional development is a constructivist activity that is realized through formal (conferences, workshops, courses) and informal activities (reading professional publications, professional meetings, watching broadcasts).

The literature (Kankaraš, 2021) mentions the term "workplace learning", which refers to an active process during which an individual acquires new knowledge and skills through the performance of tasks. In this way, the gap between the required skills that are necessary for an individual to perform a task and the acquired skills that the individual possesses, which are sometimes not sufficient to change established work patterns, is reduced. This type of learning is also seen as a way to overcome the shortcomings that arise from formal and informal education, with extrinsic and intrinsic motivation being emphasized as key factors in the success of the learning process.

Taking into account the criterion of the content of professional development, the authors Vujičić and Čamber Tambolaš (2017: 151) emphasize that "professional development must not be reduced to occasional, partial forms of professional development that are only informative in nature, but must contain transformational potential, which means that it should lead to changes in the beliefs, attitudes and values of teachers. Professional development understood in this way should primarily be based on continuous research into one's own practice as a prerequisite for its understanding and change, as well as the improvement of one's own professional competencies inherent to a teacher who is a reflective practitioner."

Learning community

“A learning community” is a social and educational environment in which individuals actively engage in the process of exchanging knowledge and experiences, in order to jointly improve their skills and competencies. In such a community, all members, including children, have the opportunity to develop through interaction and cooperation, thus creating a continuous learning process that encourages personal and collective progress.

Learning from experience is an effective way of learning for preschool children. The community in which a child engages in interactive activities plays a key role in shaping these experiences, which affects the development of each individual. The early childhood period is critical for the development of patterns that later shape behavior and life circumstances in adulthood (Weikart, 1998).

Research has shown that there is a strong connection between a high level of professionalism of teachers and their continuous professional development (Fotopoulou Ifanti, 2017). The above data suggests that the more professional development is active and focused on improving competences, the higher the level of professionalism is, which is reflected in the quality of the educational process and the learning success of the children themselves. Effective professional changes of teachers can be achieved if conditions are provided that allow them to act as active subjects who apply critical thinking in the context of joint action. Therefore, creating opportunities for cooperation and dialogue with colleagues is crucial, as it allows teachers to gain a new perspective on their own practice. In the literature, colleagues who participate in observing teachers' activities are often called “critical mirrors”, because they help develop and improve the professional work of teachers (Escamilla, Meier, 2018; Radišić, Buđevac, Jošić, Baucal, 2015).

The concept of a professional learning community has gained momentum in recent years. Many sources point to data that a well-structured and organized learning community has a positive effect on educational practice and children's achievements (Ackerman, 2008; Ackerman, 2008). Such results justify the slogan “I don't know, but maybe we do” (Briskin et al., 2009).

The improvement of teaching profession is often viewed through their engagement within a professional learning community, which as a multidimensional concept consists of the interaction of three basic factors: community, learning, and professionalism (Hairon et al., 2015).

The configuration of a community in which teachers learn includes intellectual, social, and organizational aspects that, in synergy, stimulate teachers' reflection, as well as their active participation in conversations, reading, and writing about their own work, which is the basis for continuous professional growth and development in their professional practice. In this context, research defines a community of preschool teachers as “social groups of new and experienced educators who come together over time to acquire new information, challenge previous knowledge and beliefs, and construct new knowledge based on experiences, in order to work to improve and advance children's learning” (Encyclopedia of Education, 2024). Members of a learning community can be both children and adults, and in such a community all members, whether experienced or less experienced, are active. No role that an individual plays carries full responsibility, and none of the roles that individuals can play in a community is passive (Rogof, 1994). This dynamic encourages active participation and continuous learning by all members of the community.

The sources also recognize a definition that determines a learning community as “integrated, comprehensive programs in which transformative learning takes place through a community process, through which participants develop professional, civic, and ethical responsibility” (Brower and Dettinger, 1998, 21). Collaborative work can also be defined as a process in which there is a shared vision and purpose, an adequate distribution of power within the group, through the existence of networking, coordination, cooperation, and collaboration, as well as mutual learning with the presence of individual responsibility for results (Himmelman, 1994).

The elementary purpose of professional learning communities is to increase the effectiveness of professionals and improve outcomes of children (Bolam et al., 2005). A professional learning community is a team of members who work together to meet the needs of children through a shared vision that is focused on the curriculum (Reichstetter, 2006). According to DuFour (2004), a professional learning community is based on three key principles: the first principle focuses on the learning process, not on teaching; the second emphasizes the importance of collaborative work in the learning process; and the third principle requires that individuals take responsibility for their own results. DuFour also emphasizes that the success of this community depends on the persistence and commitment of the teachers who are part of this process.

There are authors (Kilpatrick, Jones, Barrett, 2003) who view the learning community through a constructivist approach to learning in which social interaction is a key factor in building values and identity. The behavior of the individual within the learning community should be empathetic and focused on the collective, with a clearly defined long-term vision. (Briskin et al., 2009).

Research (Scribner, et al., 2002) confirms the paradox that the level of professional autonomy and attention to the individual affect the strength of the professional learning community. The authors analyze the conflict between the individual ("I") and collective ("we") approach to development and learning. According to them, the existence of professional autonomy and individual professional identity is not an obstacle, but rather encourages the teacher to actively participate in building a common identity of the learning community, which increases his belonging and role in the learning process.

The characteristics of professional learning communities are reflected in the following: there is a shared vision and shared values, collective responsibility, reflective professional reflection, collaboration, a sense of interdependence, and encouragement of group and individual learning (Bolam, et al., 2005). Group association in joint learning leads to development that goes beyond what individual action can achieve. Collective interaction enables the creation of deeper and more meaningful experiences, which are an upgrade on what individuals can achieve on their own. In this process, it becomes clear that in interaction with others there are more elements that connect than divide, leading to the creation of something greater, more meaningful, and more sublime than what can be achieved independently (Briskin et al., 2009).

What distinguishes professional learning within a community from traditional approaches is the question of how to respond to the learning difficulties that children face (DuFour, 2004). Within the concept of community learning, different forms of knowledge are combined: practical knowledge (individual skills and experiences), publicly available knowledge (theories and research results), and new knowledge, which arises as a result of co-creation through collective activities, research and problem solving (Jackson and Temperley, 2007). Learning communities in modern society must be adaptable, respect the individuality of members and clearly define the criteria for accepting new members (Brower and Dettinger, 1998).

According to information from the Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University (Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, 2024), the following roles of a learning community are highlighted:

- connecting people;
- setting goals and measuring collective progress;
- enabling collaborative learning;
- enabling a wide range of leadership roles;
- facilitating and accelerating progress in learning.

Some authors (Kilpatrick, Barrett, Jones, 2003) highlight two aspects of the learning community: personal, which involves the synergy of members in the exchange of experiences and knowledge, and material, focused on content and curricula.

Theoretical frameworks of the learning community find practical application in the professional development of teachers in Thailand. Analysis of the results shows a high commitment to this learning model, a reduction in potential problems among participants, and the achievement of success through a cooperative relationship and sustainability of the process (Meesuk et al., 2021). These models illustrate how collaborative learning leads to deeper and sustainable transformations in education.

Escamilla and Meier (2018) analyze the professional development of teachers within the learning community, especially through facilitation processes. Their research shows that a long-term commitment to self-reflection and inquiry contributes to the development of reflective tools, improved documentation skills, the creation of strategies for collaborative dialogue, and the strengthening of professional trust. These outcomes confirm the importance of a systematic and supportive approach to collaborative work.

Fundamentals of professional development models in a learning community

Professional development models are closely related to processes that involve building personal, interpersonal and organizational capacities. According to them, the development of a learning community, but also its stagnation, can be viewed through three key components (Mitchell, 2001):

- 1. Building personal capacities** - This process includes considering personal values, knowledge and skills, as well as their deconstruction in order to identify factors that limit professional development.

Internal and external analysis play a key role in this process, while reflective work leads to the re-construction of existing capacities.

2. Building interpersonal capacities - In this context, learning becomes collegial and interpersonal, and conflict is experienced as an opportunity for advancement. Communication is based on consensus and an affective climate in which each individual feels affirmative and contributes to the development of trust in the community.

3. Building organizational capacity - In a learning community power must be shared among all members, with a reduction in hierarchy and the introduction of horizontal stratification being recommended. Leadership is shared among community members, which leads to a sense of autonomy and belonging to the group, while the organization remains flexible and open to innovation.

Community-based learning is transformative learning through which an individual develops professional responsibility (how an individual acts in their early environment), ethical responsibility (a code of conduct that determines what is right and wrong), and civic responsibility (how an individual fits into the community and how they behave toward others) (Brower and Dettinger, 1998). According to the pyramid model, the three key components for enhancing these responsibilities are: the academic component, which refers to curricula and content, the social component, which involves interpersonal relationships, and the physical component, which refers to the space in which learning takes place.

The main purpose of all learning communities, according to Brower and Dettinger (1998), is to develop a group identity while valuing each individual, as well as to provide an environment that encourages transformative learning. This process includes the integration of social and academic experiences, the development of interdisciplinarity, and the encouragement of critical thinking. It is also important to create conditions for the continuous inclusion of new members and to evaluate the process and outcomes of learning. The goal is the development of professional, ethical, and civic responsibility.

An inevitable factor within a learning community is the process of collaboration, which is defined as a systematic process in which individuals work together, interdependently, analyze, and influence professional practice in order to improve results (DuFour and Eaker, 2009). The wisdom that emerges in this community between the known and the unknown creates space for new perspectives and knowledge (Briskin et al., 2009). The perception of collective efficacy, as a group's belief in its ability to achieve success, is fundamental to the organization and implementation of successful actions (Bandura, 1997).

Research findings (Stoiljković, 2020) indicate that during extraordinary circumstances that may affect educational work, teachers have a high commitment to the development of collegial relationships, collegial support and cooperative cooperation to solve emerging problems. Research (Thornton, Cherington, 2018) shows that the sustainability of professional learning communities of teachers requires the existence of the following factors: clear membership and effective introduction of new members; shared focus, commitment and research orientation; clarity of individual roles in the group, including leadership roles; opportunities for dialogue and deprivatization of practices and encouragement of new ideas.

Practical implications of a learning community for teacher professional development

The practical implications of considering a learning community for teacher professional development demonstrate the importance of continuous professional development of teachers in line with the needs of contemporary education. In addition, numerous studies highlight how continuous professional development is essential for maintaining high educational standards and for creatively addressing educational challenges. Research (Gander and McInnes, 2021), which included 75 Australian university teachers, showed that professional development in a learning community led to increased motivation, self-confidence, opportunities for self-improvement and career advancement. At the same time, other research (Múñez et al., 2017) indicates that teachers consider the workshop-based form of activity as the most effective way of professional development. Also, research (Múñez et al., 2017) highlights that a high level of engagement of teachers in informal professional development activities through collaboration is an important indicator that influences teachers to have strong beliefs in their self-efficacy.

In order to identify forms of behavior that contribute to a learning community, Bulach (1996) found that surveyed graduate students highlighted five forms of behavior that contribute to the effectiveness of a learning community: reduced anxiety, readiness to listen, reward for certain behavior, spreading

friendships, and adequate use of positive and negative criticism. Also, a year-long study (Clark, 2018) on professional development of teachers through a learning community, in which nine teachers from different institutions, districts and with different educational styles participated, showed that teachers critically examined their own practice. Through this interaction, they were able to develop supportive interpersonal relationships, which allowed them to form more sophisticated and innovative views and practices in their work with children, as well as in their relationship to early childhood education and care.

Additionally, in order to understand the benefits of bringing together teachers from different levels of education, the research (Gorodetsky and Barak, 2008) focused on a learning community was metaphorically called the “ecological edge”. This research involved 28 student teachers, 6 in-service teachers, and 4 university teachers. The results showed that joining together in such a learning community brings numerous benefits, which differ depending on the role that the participants have in the educational process:

- **Future teachers:** The learning community allowed students to break free from pre-established patterns of thinking and acting. This approach developed their ability to experiment with new ideas, which was in line with their professional identity. Flexibility in work fostered a sense of self-fulfillment and satisfaction. Also, students took greater responsibility for their learning, which led to a critical re-examination of their views, without suppressing personal preferences that could make them unconditionally adopt the views of the mentor. A fundamental component of the learning process were the practical aspects.
- **In-service teachers:** Secondary school teachers highlighted that the learning community represented a resource that encouraged their reflexivity in their work. Participation in the community allowed them to re-examine their routines and move away from stereotypical pedagogical approaches, which increased their self-confidence and criticality. This change in attitudes also strengthened their willingness to change and led to a deeper sense of gratitude towards the collaborators who participated in the process.
- **University teachers:** Although university teachers often face the threat of becoming desensitized to current issues in schools, the learning community has helped university teachers overcome the “illusion of the familiar” and reconnect with trends in school practice. Teachers have also managed to narrow the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application in schools, thereby strengthening their ability to adapt to the needs of teaching practice.

Some studies (Pyanova et al., 2017) indicate that the developed reflexivity of teachers has a positive impact on their professional motivation, making them more capable of cognitive activity, task solving and self-management. They also show a greater ability to control their actions, as well as to evaluate and correct them when necessary. However, research results also show that frequent and significant changes in the work environment, as well as changes in tasks that are often part of reform processes, can lead to unstable behavior and deterioration of the emotional state of teachers.

At the same time, reports (OECD, 2014) show that teachers who participated in professional development programs through collaborative learning experience a significant increase in confidence in their capacities and abilities to successfully cope with challenges in their work environment. These processes not only increase the personal competence of teachers, but also improve the quality of the teaching process and educational practice as a whole.

The presented research findings emphasize the importance of learning communities for the development of all participants, and show how these forms of professional development can positively impact the work environment, improve pedagogical approaches, and provide a deeper understanding of the challenges and needs of contemporary education.

Conclusion

Within a learning community, teachers’ reflection plays a key role in professional development, enabling them to compare their own views, values and experiences with colleagues and the wider community. According to Lumpe (2007), visual mapping of professional development shows how adopted strategies can be directly applied in practice, unlike formal processes that often do not include this phase of application and evaluation of results. Successful implementation of this system requires distributed leadership, planned time and structures that encourage collaboration and self-evaluation, thereby supporting continuous growth and improvement.

In this context, the kindergarten as a learning community is a dynamic space in which all members are actively involved in the process of learning and development. This community involves the exchange of knowledge, experiences and support among teachers, children and other professionals, where everyone feels like an equal member. Through this dynamic, each member of the community contributes to and enhances collective progress.

Analyzing the need for successful functioning of kindergartens, the importance of achieving one of the key goals of kindergartens is emphasized: the formation of a learning community in which different views are respected, as well as willingness to learn from each other and acting in favor of the quality of the institution and the needs of the child (Kompirović, 2024: 19). In order for this goal to be achieved, it is important that the community provides active participation of all members in the processes of communication, cooperation and professional advancement, as well as to support the development of a culture of research in the educational process (Zhang, 2024).

In order for a learning community to contribute to the improvement of the educational process, it is necessary to establish an organizational structure that encourages professional development and fosters a culture of research in the educational process, while providing the community member with autonomy and motivational incentives to make better pedagogical decisions (Supovitz, 2002).

However, an important aspect in this context is that learning communities are not uniform, as shown by research that indicates differences between different learning communities (Oztok, 2024). This means that the value of the components of a learning community is not universal, because its functioning depends on different circumstances, such as the relationships, approaches and concepts that exist within each community. In this sense, learning communities have a great impact on increasing interactive learning and critical thinking of participants (Salsabilla, 2023). This points to the importance of the environment in which teachers' professional learning takes place, and a revision of competencies, standards and evaluation systems in accordance with needs is proposed (Popović, 2023: 29).

The development of society, as well as the preschool pedagogical community, which is continuously changing, justifies the need for professional development that is flexible, adaptable and focused on current and future needs for professional advancement. The learning networks in which an individual participates enable various forms of learning: from others, together with others, in their own institution, with the transfer of knowledge and meta-learning that regulates their own learning process (Jackson and Temperley, 2007).

Professional development for preschool teachers in a learning community follows a linear course, focusing on improving knowledge, skills, and beliefs, which are integrated into everyday practice and positively impact children's outcomes. According to some authors (Hairon et al. (2015)), such an approach emphasizes the connection between personal learning and shared outcomes.



(Hairon, Goh, Chua, Wang, L. 2015)

Professional development of preschool teachers within a learning community enables the application of successful examples of practice, their adaptation to the specifics of work, and obtaining feedback that encourages self-reflection. This process results in improved outcomes for children in an environment that values learning and encourages continuous improvement (Schachter et al., 2019).

In the context of achieving these goals, David (2008) emphasizes that working together within a community is more effective than an individual approach, but that the key challenge lies in providing the conditions for such cooperation. The author emphasizes that joint research into one's own practice is the most promising, but also the most demanding, strategy for developing learning. Teachers who are involved in learning communities with positive development of communication, above all, experience a sense of belonging and a sense of success (Scotese, 2014).

A more advanced model of professional development of preschool teachers encourages reflective thinking, the exchange of practical experiences, and deeper collaboration with other practitioners and educational institutions. This approach includes mentoring, active learning, shared problem solving, and mutually supportive dialogue, thereby developing professional competencies (Jensen and Iannone, 2018).

The emphasis is on collaborative working methods that are developed from the bottom up, that is, through the participation of practitioners themselves, thus creating an environment that promotes professional trust and continuous improvement of practice.

Analyzing the statements of the aforementioned authors, we can conclude that learning itself and professional development within the community is primarily a collaborative process, a process of joint co-operation and exchange of experience in which both group and individual dynamics of development, both personal and professional development, are respected. Improving the competence of preschool teachers is done through self-evaluation and reflection on their work, the existence of common goals and collective problem-solving within the community, collaborative learning, practical application and respect for the principle of diversity. In order for this process to produce the most comprehensive results, it is necessary to work on continuity.

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization Č.S., T.K., and D.P.; Investigation Č.S.; Project administration: Č.S.; Supervision T.K., D.P.; Resources Č.S.; Validation T.K., D.P.; Visualization Č.S.; Writing – original draft Č.S., T.K., and D.P.; Writing – review & editing T.K., D.P.

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